श्री सभापति: नहीं, रेग्युलर नहीं, In which year was it done?

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: Sir, no specific studies have yet been done. But we regularly monitor...

SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: I would like to know from the hon. Minister when we studied the storage capacity in respect of 15 reservoirs. When was this done? Is it not a very clear question? Should I not get a clear-cut reply on this? And on what basis has the CWC felt that desiltation was necessary. ...(*Interruptions*).. The technical people are not doing their job. They think that the Members may ...(*Interruptions*).. and they can be taken for a ride.

AN HON. MEMBER: Please listen.

श्री दीपांकर मुखर्जी: मैं तो लिसन ही कर रहा हूं। I want to help you. ...(*Interruptions*)..

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: Sir, as regards the specific period in which any specific study was done, I have no information at present. I will certainly supply it to the hon. Member.

MR. CHAIRMAN : This is all right.

SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: It is not all right, Sir. With all humility, I want to say that this is not correct ...(*Interruptions*).. It is a very serious problem. ...(*Interruptions*)..

श्री भारतेन्दु प्रकाश सिंहल: सभापति जी, माननीय मंत्री जी ने कहा है कि सिल्टिंग निकालेंगे तो उसकी प्राब्लम उठेगी। ब्रिज क्षेत्र में अभी ब्रिजभान कुण्ड का डीसिल्टिंग किया है, गांव वाले उस सिल्ट को उठाकर अपने फील्ड्स में ले गए। इसमें इतनी उर्वरक शक्ति होती है कि गांव के खेतों को उससे जबर्दस्त लाभ हो रहा है। आपको कोई खर्च नहीं करना पड़ेगा, गांव वाले उसे खुद उठाकर ले जाएंगे। यह प्राब्लम नहीं है, वह असेट है? क्या मंत्री जी इस पर विचार करेंगे?

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI: It will be certainly considered.

विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार

*305. श्री कृपाल परमार: क्या वित्त मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) क्या यह सच है कि देश का विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार 95 बिलियन अमरीकी डालर से भी अधिक हो गया है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो क्या यह भी सच है कि इसका अधिकांश भाग डॉलर से भी अधिक हो गया है; और

(ग) यदि हां, तो पिछले तीन महीनों से लगातार डालर के गिरते दामों तथा निकट भविष्य में इसके लगभग 25 प्रतिशत और गिरने की आंशका के मद्देनजर देश को आर्थिक दृष्टि से होने वाली हानि से बचाने के लिए सरकार क्या कदम उठा रही है?

वित्त मंत्री (श्री जसवंत सिंह): (क) से (ग) एक विवरण सदन के पटल पर प्रस्तुत है।

विवरण

(क) जी, हां।

(ख) और (ग) विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार का प्रबंधन एवं संचालन भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक (आरबीआई) द्वारा किया जाता है ये भंडार अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय परिवर्तनीय मुद्राओं वाले एक बहु-मुद्रा पोर्टफोलियो में निवेशित किए जाते हैं। इन भंडारों के अभियोजन का दिशा-निर्देश सुरक्षा, नकदीनिधि और प्रतिफल के सिद्धान्तों द्वारा किया जाता है भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय विदेशी मुद्रा बाजारों के घटनाक्रमों को बारीकी से मानिटर करता है और भंडार की मुद्रा संरचना में आवश्यक और उपयुक्त समायोजन करता है। इन भंडारों की सही संरचना का खुलासा नहीं किया जाता है।

Foreign exchange reserves

†*305. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the foreign exchange reserves of the country has crossed the $95 billion mark;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that maximum portion there of happens to be in dollars; and

(c) if so, what steps Government are taking in view of the falling prices of dollar for the last three months as also of the apprehension of its further decline by about twenty five per cent in near future and to avoid financial losses the country is likely to suffer from?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) A statement is placed on the Table of the House.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Foreign exchange reserves are managed and operated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The reserves are invested in a multi-currency portfolio consisting of international convertible currencies. Deployment of reserves is guided by the principles of safety, liquidity and return. The RBI closely monitors the developments in international foreign exchange markets and makes the needed and suitable adjustments in currency composition of reserves. The precise currency composition of reserves is not disclosed.

श्री कृपाल परमार: सभापति जी धन्यवाद, आपने मुझे राष्ट्रीय महत्व और राष्ट्रीय स्वाभिमान के प्रश्न को पूछने का मौका दिया । माननीय मंत्री जी ने अपने उत्तर में कहा है कि यह भंडार अंतर्राष्ट्रीय परिवर्तनीय मुद्राओं वाले एक बहुमुद्रा पोर्टफोलियों में निवेश किया जाता है। मेरी जानकारी के मुताबिक इसका अधिकांश हिस्सा डालर में है मैंने यही प्रश्न किया था कि डालर की कीमत लगातर गिरती जा रही है और दुनिया के जो विशेष प्रबुद्ध अर्थशास्त्री हैं, मि. स्टिग्लिट्ज ई. जोसेफ, जिन्हें नोबेल लारेट मिला हैं और जो वर्ल्ड बैंक के चीफ इकोनामिस्ट और वाइस प्रेजिडेंट भी रहे हैं, उन्होंने अंदेशा जाहिर किया है कि पिछले एक साल में डालर की कीमत में पच्चीस फीसदी की गिरावट आई है और अगले साल और पच्चीस फीसदी गिर सकती है। मैं माननीय मंत्री जी से जानना चाहता हूं कि जो भंडार हमने डालर के रूप में निवेश किया है, क्या आप उसके बारे में कोई विचार करेंगे ताकि इस घाटे से बचा जा सके।

श्री जसवंत सिंह: सभापति जी, मैं माननीय सदस्य को आश्वस्त कर दूं कि भारत में प्रबुद्ध अर्थशास्त्रियों की कोई कमी नहीं है। इन्होंने किसी प्रबुद्ध अर्थशास्त्री के नाम का उल्लेख किया और कहा कि क्योंकि वे वर्ल्ड बैंक में काम करते हैं और शायद उन्हें नोबल प्राइज मिला है इसलिए वे विशेष जानकारी भारत की बातों में रखते हैं। मैं इसका सीधा संबंध नहीं समझता हूं। भारत का जो रिजर्व बैंक आफ इंडिया है, यह इसे मैनेज करता है यह बहुत ही सुचारू ढंग से मैनेज होता है। किस अनुपात में, किस करेंसी में रखा जाए, यह रिवर्ज बैंक का निर्णय होता है। मैं माननीय सदस्य को आश्वस्त करूंगा कि यदि कोई बाहर बैठे हुए इस पर चिंता जता रहा है तो आप विश्वास रखिए कि उनकी चिंता जताने से कई महीने पहले रिजर्व बैंक इस पर कदम उठा चुका होगा।

SHRI MURLI DEORA: Sir, it is really heartening to note that in 13 years the foreign exchange reserves have gone up from one billion dollar to 100 billion dollars and that the foreign borrowings have, in the last 13 years, have gone up by only 17 billion dollars. I would like to ask the hon. Minister how the Government is going to utilise these reserves.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: Sir it is not as if the 100 billion dollars are lying in a drawer, which can be pulled out and the money utilised for purchase of groceries of things like that. This is a national asset. The reserves have been built up over a period of time. The reserves, certainly, lend to my conviction a sense of much greater confidence within the country and the economic system. It enables our corporates to borrow better abroad.

So far as the utilisation is concerned, on a medium-term basis, I would like to share with the hon. Member a longer picture because I see a considerable growth coming through the import bill requirements of the country, and when the import bill begings to go up, there will be a great deal of demand on our reserves. When that happens, then, there will be a draw-down. I don't believe that we have reached some kind of a plateau. Now, that India's reserves have reached where they have, it is my conviction again that they will continue to go. We have utilised our reserves in the past one year to pre-pay some of the high-cost debts. We have pre-paid, Sir, as you know and as the hon. Members know very well almost 7 billion dollars. Despite the early repayment of 7 billion dollars, we have reached the figures that we have. Therefore, we will continue to pre-pay others. The Government of India has also initiated steps whereby we are no longer taking grants or assistance which we were earlier taking in very small denominations from a variety of countries, which stood by India in time of need. But we have now said this is , perhaps better utilised, if channelled either to other countries or through non-governmental organisations. We have also simultaneously, initiated steps whereby the Government of India now, in fact, grants loans and grants to some of the least developed countries as also others. So, it is serving many purposes, economic, commercial, psychological as also diplomatic.

SHRI ROBERT KHARSHIING: Mr. Chairman, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister that whether the Tarapore Commission set up by the RBI itself had recommended 1997 as the year for making the rupee fully convertible. But, six years later and 12 years after liberalisation, using lame excuses, the RBI still controls the rupee. The Indian farmer as well as all of us have to work 80 times more than the British farmer because one pound is equal to 80 rupees. The countries which strive for transparency have freed their currencies, including a country like Uganda; and the loss to exports would be evened out by the same exporters being able to make acquisitions abroad when the rupee...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Come to your question.

SHRI ROBERT KHARSHIING: Sir, it is very important. Just as Coca Cola and Pepsi have acquired in India, India's fundamentals are so strong it no longer justifies control of the rupee. With 50 billion dollar exports in merchandised last year, in textiles, tea, coffee, spices, etc., and 13.5 billion in software exports, this year, with a 100 billion dollar foreign exchange reserves, and with the third or the fourth largest economy in the world...

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is enough. If you want to say something, then, put your question. I won't allow you now.

SHRI ROBERT KHARSHIING: May I know from the hon. Minister when the Government proposes to free the rupee and make it fully convertible?

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: Sir, it is a very interesting thesis that the hon. Member has read out. I appreciated the effort that he has put into it. The suggestion that the rupee is in some kind of bond, is in bondage, is incorrect. The rupee is not in bondage. As the hon. Member knows, in the last 12-18 months, there is already the process of opening up and liberalisation is really quite remarkable. Now, the corporates can take out substantial sums of money for investment; property can be owned abroad; citizens who were earlier, all of us were, converted into some kind of criminals as we would hide notes in our suitcases when travelling abroad so that they could be converted. That phase is over. The citizen can take monies abroad. The citizen can now purchase on credit cards while in India. The former Governor of Reserve Bank of India, who is currently with us as one of our distinguished Members, has done a lot in this regard. It is quite often cited that so far as the flow is concerned, there is no restriction on flow of money, but on the total convertibility of currency, many other factors come in-for example, the fiscal deficit state, so also the inflation state. And, there is a route map that the former Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India, Mr. Tarapore, had suggested to the country. So long as we are not able to combine fiscal and inflation at a level which is comfortable for us, I don't think there should be any anxiety about the full convertibility, because benefits are available in almost near totality.

*306. *[The questioner* (SHRI NANA DESHMUKH) *was absent. For answer vide page 146]*